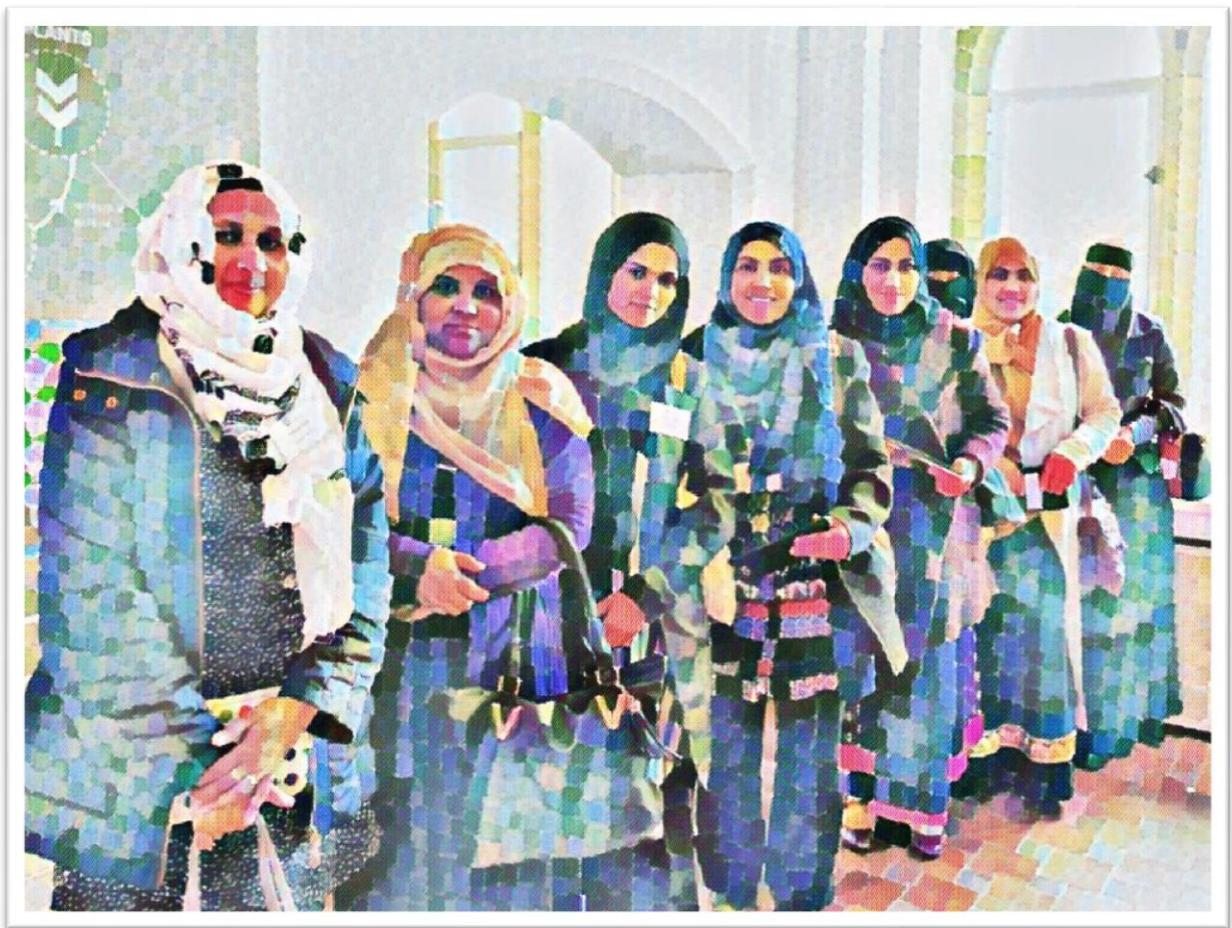


# Graphic Lives

## Telling Bangladeshi migrant women's stories through graphic narratives

February 2017 - January 2018

OH-16-00309



## Highlights of the Graphic Lives project

- We created nine comics telling the life stories of women from the British Bangladeshi community in Hyde, Greater Manchester.
- The comics highlighted the emotions associated with migration in an immediate and relatable way.
- Creating comics allowed women with limited English skills to share their stories widely.
- The women visited museums and galleries to engage with collections, many for the first time.
- The women developed digital, creative and communication skills, and developed confidence through sharing their experiences.
- Participants shared their comics with pupils from local primary schools and supported them in creating their own comics.
- The comics were shared at local, regional and national festivals, reaching a variety of audiences including: families, artists, writers, publishers, community workers, educators, academics and the general public.
- The project has generated significant interest from a wide range of organisations across the public, charity and academic sectors.

### 1. Outline of the project

Graphic Lives was a joint project involving Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) and Hyde Community Action (HCA). Through the project, we aimed to challenge preconceptions and widen representations of migrant heritage in order to raise awareness; change attitudes and behaviours; and ultimately, improve understanding and cohesion. In particular, the heritage of British Bangladeshi women was recorded and communicated through the creation and sharing of digital comics that integrate personal experiences with broader historical narratives.

The project saw women from the British Bangladeshi community in Hyde in Greater Manchester exploring their own life stories and the historical narratives of their communities through workshops on life history, cross-cultural storytelling and digital skills, as well as visits to museums and galleries to engage with collections. They then used a simple online comics creation tool to communicate their own multimedia story using photographs, drawings and text in any language.

To encourage wider participation, we organised a celebration event for the local community and showcased the project at the following events: Rochdale Literature and Ideas Festival, Comics Forum (Leeds), Chester Comics Con and the Lakes International Comic Art Festival (Kendal), as well as running sessions in two local schools and two workshops at MMU events. We produced a resource pack to encourage and support other organisations wishing to undertake similar activities.

The project aimed to achieve the outcomes listed below.

#### a. Heritage will be better identified and recorded

The history of the Bangladeshi community in the UK has less frequently been the focus of research compared to other ethnic minority communities. In particular, the heritage of Bangladeshi women and of communities outside London have often been overlooked. This project aimed go some way towards addressing these gaps by identifying and recording a group of Bangladeshi women's stories

as graphic narratives. These were then made available in a variety of settings including schools, university, local communities, arts events and online.

**b. People will have learnt about heritage**

The women at the centre of the project have had opportunities to learn about the heritage of their community in considerable depth: from each other and from visits to museum, gallery and archive collections connected with the heritage of South Asia and of South Asian communities in the UK. Through the dissemination phase of the project, more people, and a wide range of people, have engaged with heritage, including school students, families, the general public and artists.

**c. People will have developed skills**

The women at the heart of this project have had opportunities to develop creative skills (e.g. storytelling, comics creation); digital skills (e.g. use of tablets; manipulation of digital media); and communication skills (e.g. through communicating their stories and heritage to others). The people we worked with in schools and at events during the dissemination phase have also had opportunities to develop creative and communication skills through participating in workshops to understand more about the project and to create their own comics.

**d. People will have changed their attitudes and/or behaviour**

Through this project, the women have had opportunities to think about their heritage in different ways, in particular, realising how their personal stories are integrated within a broader historical and community narrative. In addition, people with whom we shared the women's stories have started to think differently about the heritage of i) the British Bangladeshi community ii) South Asian women iii) migrant communities more generally iv) their own community heritage, through engaging with the women's stories.

## **2. Evaluation methods**

We evaluated the success of the project in the following ways.

**a. Evidence that heritage is identified and recorded (and shared):**

- analysing the comics created to identify key themes or aspects of heritage recorded
- feedback from museum/gallery staff reflecting on the ways their collections are interpreted by different groups
- recording individuals and organisations with whom information about the project, or the comics themselves, are shared, including demographic details where it is practical to do so
- tracking website usage and downloads
- evidence of project outputs available in AIU archive.

**b. Evidence that people have learnt about heritage and become more aware of the difference this makes to their lives:**

- informal conversations and group discussions with the women about their developing understanding of their community heritage (e.g. new things they have learnt about their history; ways they have used new knowledge gained through the project)
- conversations and feedback from people attending dissemination events reflecting learning about heritage

- feedback from organisations and individuals receiving copies of the finished comics by post or email
  - analysing the comics created to identify examples of increased understanding of community heritage.
- c. **Evidence of improved digital, creative and literacy/communication skills and confidence:**
- informal conversations and group discussions with the women from HCA (e.g. new things they know how to do; things they feel more confident in doing)
  - observations in workshops noting evidence of these skills.

Although we hope those attending one-off workshops at festivals, schools etc. developed some of these skills, it was only feasible to look for evidence of a change in skills and confidence among the women with whom we are working over an extended period.

- d. **Evidence of changed attitudes towards Bangladeshi women and migrant communities:**
- conversations and feedback from people attending dissemination events evidencing their reactions to the women's comics
  - feedback from organisations and individuals receiving copies of the finished comics by post or email
  - informal conversations and group discussions with the women about the reactions of others to their comics.

## **2.1 Evaluation of women's engagement in the project**

We chose more informal methods of evaluation to capture the women's experiences because we felt that questionnaires or formal interviews (especially if conducted in English) were likely to be off-putting for this group. The majority of evidence was collected through informal discussions with the women on an ongoing basis throughout the project, allowing us to track changes in understanding, skills and attitudes, as well as making adjustments to the planned activities in response to their comments on an ongoing basis. The majority of discussions occurred within the organised sessions, but there were also occasions when relevant conversations occurred outside of project sessions and were noted by the HCA learner support worker. In addition, we held two organised group discussions (with an interpreter): one at a relatively early stage in the project, and one at the end of the comics creation phase.

We had also hoped to allow the women to engage in online discussion in a secure area of the comics software, allowing them to comment on and respond to each other's comics. However, due to technology issues (reported below), we had to change the software used and this was not possible. However, there were numerous opportunities for the women to share and discuss their comics during the face-to-face sessions and we made notes of their comments.

## **2.2 Evaluation of sharing activities**

We drew evidence from informal discussions with attendees at workshops taking place in schools, at MMU and at community and arts events, and also from emails sent by attendees after the events. In addition, we gathered evidence from emails received from individuals or organisations with whom we shared the comics by email or post.

It is important to note that the sharing activities are still continuing as further people and organisations hear about the project and want to know more. We will continue to record evidence of the impact of the project after its official end date.

### **3. Evaluation of project management**

The following section reflects on aspects of the general management of the project not covered under the project outcomes.

#### **3.1 Recruitment**

We initially recruited 10 women to the project. For personal reasons, two women dropped out during the first few weeks. We were able to recruit a further participant who was able to 'catch up' with the rest of the group. We therefore produced nine comics. We regard it as an important success for the project that we were able to retain almost all the participants over an extended period of time despite many other pressures on the women's time (e.g. caring responsibilities). The HCA learner support worker played a critical role in keeping the group together and ensuring they attended sessions.

#### **3.2 Workshops and visits**

Table 1 shows the preparatory workshop sessions and visits the women took part in. These took place between mid-March and late May 2017. As set out in the application, we ran workshops on life story, graphic novels and cross-cultural storytelling. The women did not need as much support using the tablets as we had anticipated. We therefore only required two digital skills workshops. However, they required more support to develop their stories, so we added two comics planning sessions before they started to create their digital comics.

We visited Manchester Museum and the Whitworth Art Gallery at this stage of the project. However, because of the timing of school holidays and Ramadan, we were not able to schedule a visit to Manchester Metropolitan University's Special Collections. We therefore included this in the dissemination activities in the autumn (see 3.4).



Session	Activities
<b>Introductory workshop</b>	Introduction to the project
<b>Digital skills workshop 1</b>	Using a tablet – basic digital skills
<b>Digital skills workshop 2</b>	Working with digital images to explore life story
<b>Personal (life) and community histories</b>	Look at examples of materials from local studies collections Connecting the past, present and future
<b>Cross-cultural storytelling workshop</b>	Devising a story outline using a pin board, pins and thread (Guest facilitator: Emma Dawson Varughese)
<b>Comics &amp; graphic novels workshop</b>	Looking at examples of comics and picture books (Guest facilitator: Mel Gibson)
<b>Visit to Manchester Museum</b>	Handling session and introduction to museum and other projects with South Asian communities (Supported by Andrea Winn)
<b>Planning comics</b>	Developing characters. Connecting places and objects. Thinking about different pathways through stories.
<b>Planning comics (2)</b>	Identifying the Snakes (challenges) and Ladders (good things) in life stories. Storyboarding using printed 9/12-panel pages.
<b>Visit to Whitworth Art Gallery</b>	To visit South Asian textiles exhibition & Beyond Borders exhibition (Supported by Uthra Rajgopal)

*Table 1: Preparatory workshops and visits*

Unsurprisingly, it was not possible for all the women to attend all of the sessions (e.g. due to illness). The learner support worker encouraged and supported participants who had to miss sessions to catch up with tasks and activities in between scheduled group sessions. The support worker was also involved in organising the group to go on visits, including travel training to tackle fear and low confidence on taking public transport. In addition, she helped to arrange childcare placements to allow women with young children to attend regularly.

### 3.3 Comics creation

We had originally planned to use Pixton software (<https://www.pixton.com/>) to create the digital comics. However, this requires internet access and although the venue at HCA does have wifi, we experienced problems when all 10 tablets tried to connect at the same time. We therefore needed to find suitable software that could be used offline. We decided to use Book Creator (<https://bookcreator.com/>) as this can be downloaded as an app and used without internet access.

We ran seven sessions during June and July to allow the women to create their digital comics. Women who were not able to attend all of these sessions, or needed additional time to finish their comic, were able to arrange one-to-one sessions with the learner support worker at HCA during August and early September.

### 3.4 Sharing sessions

We ran two story-sharing sessions with Year 6 pupils at local primary schools. In each session, we shared and discussed one of the women's stories then supported the pupils in drawing their own

comics. These were based on their own lives, but had an imaginary or magical twist to the story. (See [https://twitter.com/year\\_six/status/910091435600433152](https://twitter.com/year_six/status/910091435600433152) for pictures from one of the workshops).

We also ran two university-based workshops: one was part of a conference for academics, artists and community partners; and the other was a standalone session held in MMU's Special Collections. The audience for this workshop included academics, students and staff from local authorities (e.g. library services) and museums. Both these workshops have been successful in generating interest in the project and potential partnerships for further work within the public, charity and academic sectors (see section 4 for further details).

### 3.5 Other events

We showcased the project at the following community events and comics festivals: Rochdale Literature and Ideas Festival, Comics Forum (Leeds), Chester Comics Con, Laydeez do Comics (Leeds) and the Lakes International Comic Art Festival (Kendal). This allowed us to reach a wide range of audiences.

We held a celebration event at Hyde Town Hall towards the end of the project. As this coincided with celebrations for HCA's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we decided to combine the two, so this became larger event than we had originally planned.

### 3.6 Archiving

Print copies of the comics have been archived at the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Archives at Manchester Central Library. Digital copies have been deposited in Figshare.

## 4. Evaluation of project outcomes

The following section reports on each of the project outcomes.

### 4.1 Identifying and recording heritage

The project has produced nine comics depicting the heritage of British Bangladeshi women living in Greater Manchester.

- Juie's story: <https://issuu.com/happinessdragon/docs/juie>
- Sadisa's story: <https://issuu.com/happinessdragon/docs/sadisa>
- Shahida's story: <https://issuu.com/happinessdragon/docs/shahida>
- Siddika's story: <https://issuu.com/happinessdragon/docs/siddika>
- Aysha's story: <https://issuu.com/happinessdragon/docs/aysha>
- Amina's story: <https://issuu.com/happinessdragon/docs/amina>
- Fatima's story: <https://issuu.com/happinessdragon/docs/fatima>
- Shapla's story: <https://issuu.com/happinessdragon/docs/shapla>
- Samia's story: <https://issuu.com/happinessdragon/docs/samia>

Each of the women has created an individual comic using her own words, drawings and images. However, there were some of the common themes found across the women's comics.

**Closeness to family in Bangladesh:** This was one of the strongest and most common themes. Despite living far from their families and having very limited opportunities to visit, the women feel a very strong connection to parents, siblings and even extended family members such as nieces and nephews in Bangladesh.

**Associating Bangladesh with happy memories and less stress:** Even though they may have experienced upsetting events in Bangladesh, such as the death of a parent, the women's memories of growing up there are overwhelmingly positive. They feel their lives in Bangladesh were much less stressful than their current lives in the UK.

**Dealing with bureaucracy:** Navigating bureaucracy, for example procedures to acquire citizenship or requirements to register for educational courses, is a frequent challenge. Identity becomes something that has to be proved and demonstrated.

**Living with in-laws:** The women were usually expected to live with their in-laws, at least when they first moved to the UK. While some women have supportive relationships with their in-laws, many experienced challenges in not only moving to a new country, but also joining a new household. The complex relationships within extended families can place considerable pressure on the women as daughters-in-law.

**Expectations of women:** Societal and cultural expectations and responsibilities placed on women were a common theme, for example, caring for elderly relatives or getting married rather than completing their studies.

**Valuing education:** Many of the women had studied in Bangladesh and are also keen to gain qualifications in the UK. Whilst some are making use of their education, for example by teaching Arabic, others feel they are not yet using their skills and knowledge fully in the UK.

**Wanting independence:** The women are keen to secure greater independence for themselves, for example, by learning to driving or getting a job and their own income. Finding ways to do this in a country that is still unfamiliar to them in many ways can be challenging.

**Finding a support network:** Leaving their family in Bangladesh means the women often lack the support network they might otherwise have been able to rely on. As well as providing practical support, families are important sources of encouragement and reassurance. Living in the UK, the women need to seek out alternatives such as HCA.

**Having children:** Having children often helped the women to feel more positive about living in the UK; although they still miss their family in Bangladesh, they are keen to ensure the best future for their children. On the other hand, experiencing miscarriages and other fertility problems can have a severe negative impact.

**The challenge of learning English:** Although the women had learnt some English at school in Bangladesh, this is very different from the English they are likely to hear in their everyday lives in the UK. They are keen to improve their English, but it is not always easy to find time and opportunities to study.

Print copies of the nine comics created (plus the resource pack) have been archived at the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Centre at Manchester Central Library (Figure 1).



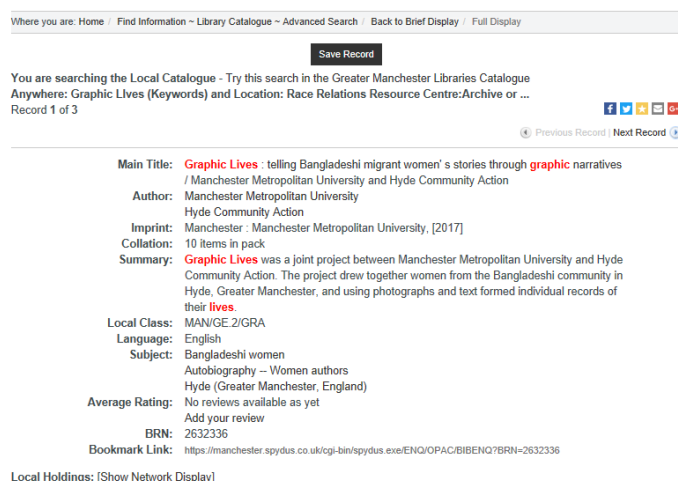


Figure 1: Screenshot from AIU catalogue

The Centre also has copies of the comics to hand out to interested students and members of the general public. Copies have also been sent to Salford Zine Library. Several sets of the comics have been sent to Tameside Libraries and Oldham Libraries for accessioning and for distribution to their branches. Digital versions of the comics have been deposited in Figshare (<https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.5661718.v1>).

All project outputs are available as pdf downloads at:

[http://www.esri.mmu.ac.uk/resprojects/project\\_outline.php?project\\_id=180](http://www.esri.mmu.ac.uk/resprojects/project_outline.php?project_id=180)<sup>1</sup>. In addition, versions for online reading are available at: <https://issuu.com/happinessdragon>.

Other organisations which have been sent digital and/or print copies of the comics include: Legacy WM (Birmingham), Henna Asian Women's Group (London), Hopscotch Asian Women's Centre (London), Migrant Voice, Migrants' Rights, Women for Refugee Women, Ziggy's Wish (Manchester), Cumbrian Multicultural Women's Network, Oral History Society, Rochdale Pioneers Museum, Newcastle University Students' Union and Shapla Bangladeshi Women's Group (Crewe).

## 4.2 Learning about heritage

Through discussing their personal stories in the workshop sessions, the women saw how their own experiences were often similar to those of others in the group, and formed part of a wider cultural heritage.

During the session on life history, we discussed extracts from oral history transcripts from Tameside Archives and from the [Bangla Food Journeys](#) project<sup>2</sup>. This led to a wide-ranging discussion on topics including food, housing, marriage, travel, language, education and employment. These themes became part of many of the comics.

The visits to Manchester Museum and the Whitworth Art Gallery were the first experiences of visiting a museum or gallery for many of the women. They clearly enjoyed these experiences; the trips were mentioned as a highlight in the final focus group discussions. A number said they intended to return to the museum/gallery and bring their families. They particularly liked seeing the South

<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately it is not possible to track usage of this page due to the database set up on this website.

<sup>2</sup> A HLF-funded project carried out by Legacy-WM.

Asian textiles in the Whitworth and some of the group followed this up by looking for examples of textiles online (<http://www.tmoi.org.uk/>).

Some of the women included direct references to their experiences of the project in their comics. For example, Samia wrote that seeing the textiles in the Whitworth Art Gallery reminded her of her wedding sari. Shahida included a memory of playing board games as a child in her comic after we talked about games found in different cultures.

As one of the women said about her experience of the project:

*I've enjoyed telling my story. It's helped me to remember my background and given me an opportunity to talk about the past.*

However, reflecting on the past was not always an easy experience as these comments from two of the women show:

*It was difficult emotionally to think about the past*

*It was hard [to think about the past]; we cried sometimes.*

Feedback from people who engaged with the comics during dissemination activities highlighted the commonality between these Bangladeshi women's experiences and those of other immigrant groups.

The events we attended to share the comics were chosen to attract a range of audiences.

**Chester Comics Con:** Much of the audience at this event consisted of teenagers and young adults. There was a lot of interest in the project, especially from young women who were pleased to see other women's stories being told through comics.

**Lakes International Comic Art Festival, Kendal:** This event attracts many families, but also appeals to artists and others working in the comics field nationally and internationally. This two-day event was, perhaps, one of the most successful sharing activities. The women from HCA came to the festival as a group on the Saturday and were thrilled to see their comics displayed as part of a major event. We had many interesting discussions, for example, with artists and community workers who had experience of projects with similar groups. Several people took sets of the comics to share with community groups they worked with, including Claire Griffel from the [Imagine Senegal](#) project and [Lucy Bergonzi](#), an artist who has worked on a number of community projects.

**Rochdale Literature and Ideas Festival:** Our participation at this event was supported by Emma Dawson-Varghese who brought her '[Karvan](#)' to Rochdale. Unfortunately attendance was limited by very poor weather, but we were able to share the project with a number of families and individuals.

**Comics Forum, Leeds:** This event is attended by a mixture of artists and academics. The project was very well-received here and this event led to a number of other possibilities for dissemination, including links with Leeds Library and with the HLF-funded Oslertry Heritage Comics project. We were also asked to write a blog post about the project which is available on the [Comics Forum blog](#).

**Laydeez do Comics, Leeds:** We were invited to talk about the project at the Laydeez do Comics event in Leeds. These events are attended by artists, writers, educators and others.

### 4.3 Developing skills

*I learnt how to use comics tools and how to express myself using pictures and writing to make a story.*

*It's given me confidence.*

The women from HCA developed a range of skills through participating in the project. These included digital skills in the use of new technology; creative skills in storytelling and comics making; and communication skills in sharing their stories. We also saw them gain confidence as they shared their stories with each other, as well as with people from outside group. This increased confidence in themselves gave the women more hope that they can achieve goals and aspirations for their lives in the UK.

#### 4.3.1 Digital skills

*I learnt how to use pictures and how to do editing*

*Although I've used technology before, I hadn't used it like we did for photos...*

For some of the women using a tablet was a new experience. Others had experience of using new technology, but had not used it in the ways we did in this project. The digital skills the women gained included:

- Taking photos with a tablet camera
- Editing photos (e.g. using filters, cropping)
- Searching for images online and saving them
- Basic understanding of 'usage rights' for images found online
- Changing keyboards to write in different languages
- Using translation software
- Use the Book Creator software to create their own comic.



### 4.3.2 Creative skills

*I feel like I'm a writer now!*

The women had not thought about the possibility of telling life stories through comics prior to the project. None were graphic novel readers and their only previous experience had been of reading children's comics. Through studying examples of a variety of different types of comics in detail, the women gained a good understanding of how to tell stories using this medium. Looking at published comics also gave some of them more confidence in their own drawing skills as they realised that, in a comic, drawings do not have to be highly polished or detailed. The finished comics illustrate many of the design and storytelling techniques they have learnt, for example, ways to use different colours to represent happy, sad or other types of feelings associated with certain events.

The group also understood that stories do not have to be linear or to follow a single narrative. The exercise plotting their stories using pin boards helped them to appreciate this and was a critical moment in their understanding of their own story for many of the women.



### 4.3.3 Communication skills

*I was able to express myself about personal issues.*

The women gained confidence in sharing their stories within the group during the first phase of the project. The idea of communicating using pictures as well as words was a powerful one. When the women created storyboards for their comics on paper, they chose to use images rather than words to convey most elements of their stories. Another important idea was that of using whichever language they preferred. They were keen for their finished comics to be in English so they could be more widely understood, but in the process of creating their comics, many of the women also used Bangla and/or Urdu. In some cases, translating this into English for the final comic was a group effort.



The women played key roles in the dissemination process. Members of the group came to each of the school workshops to share their stories with pupils and support them in making their own comics. The majority of the women came to the Lakes Comics Festival and one staffed the stall for a while. Perhaps the most empowering event however was the workshop at MMU. Three of the women attended this and, after a brief introduction about the project, they each took responsibility for working with a small group of participants: sharing their story; discussing their experiences of the project; and demonstrating some of the activities from the project. Having the confidence and communication skills to be able to lead a group professionals is something the women, rightly, felt proud of.



#### 4.4 Changing attitudes and/or behaviour

Many of those who have read the comics so far describe them as ‘moving’ suggesting that telling the women’s stories in this way is effective in communicating the emotion aspects of their journey, not simply the practical implications of migration. We will continue to examine changes in behaviours and attitudes amongst people who read the women’s comics.

When asked what they had enjoyed most about the project, most of the women mentioned the social aspect and the supportive atmosphere of the group. They had enjoyed meeting new people and liked the fact that:

*Everyone is friendly and supports each other.*

Some of the women were a little uncertain about taking part at first, but having a positive experience of taking part of in a project like this made them more willing to consider taking part in similar activities in the future. For some, however, knowing sufficient English was something they worried about if there was no interpreter. The learner support worker was essential in providing reassurance that language support was available at every point of contact to enable all participants to fully contribution to the sessions.

When we asked if there was anything they were going to do as a result of the project, several of the women mentioned enrolling on courses, for example English or computer classes. In fact, in the new academic year, some of the women did start courses at a local college. For example 'Shapla' is now studying English (Level 1), Maths (Level 2) and Childcare. She is also working on a voluntary basis in a local charity shop to gain work experience in the UK. She is planning to learn to drive in the near future. Other women from the project have started to access more services available at HCA, for example, Healthy Eating, Be Well and employment support services.

Furthermore, through the story telling sessions, HCA was able to identify that some participants needed additional support with coping day-to-day stress. This evidence informed its proposal to bring a Healthy Minds service to a locally accessible venue and this is now available at HCA.

#### **4 Future of the project**

At the end of the funding period, MMU will maintain the webpages, including the comics and resource pack, for a minimum of three years. Copies of all the outputs have been archived at the AIU archive at Manchester Central Library and accessioned at Tameside and Oldham Libraries making them available to researchers and the general public.

The resource pack is a key output of the project as this will provide support for other groups (e.g. migrant support groups, adult educators, charities supporting migrants) to conduct similar activities, perhaps focusing on different migration experiences (e.g. different ethnicities, forced migration, second generation migrants). The [resource pack](#) contains session plans and handouts created for each of the workshops and offers advice about practical and technical issues likely to be faced in conducting this type of activity. We will continue to promote this to interested organisations beyond the project end date.

Although the project has officially finished, we are planning to continue working with interested organisations to extend the reach of the project further.

**Oldham Libraries:** We had arranged to deliver a workshop session at Oldham Library in September 2017. Unfortunately this had to be cancelled due to confusion over bookings. However, we now plan to take the project to Oldham Library as part of Oldham Comics Con in May 2018. Oldham Libraries have been particularly interested in the project and we are also planning to work with them to deliver a 'taster workshop' at Northmoor community library in March 2018.

**Jubilee Project, Stoke-on-Trent:** The project leader from the Jubilee Project that supports refugees and asylum seekers attended one of the MMU workshops and has asked for a taster workshop for members of their group.

**Comics, Community & Culture event:** We are planning to take part in the Comics, Community & Culture event (part of the HLF-funded Oswestry Heritage Comics Project) in May 2018.

**Teaching activities:** We are planning to use the comics as part of teaching sessions in the Faculty of Education at MMU and a lecturer at Brunel University has also expressed interest in using them within his teaching.



## 5 Lessons learnt

Key lessons learnt from the experiences of this project include:

**The importance of language support:** the learner support worker and HCA volunteer interpreters were highly important in ensuring all the women could participate in the activities and engage in discussions whatever their skills in English.

**The need for flexibility:** some of the women were not able to attend all the sessions, for example because of illness or family responsibilities. The sessions had to be organised flexibly to allow them to drop in and out as they needed to. In addition, the learner support worker arranged one-to-one follow up sessions with those who missed sessions to allow them to complete the project. There was also a need for flexibility in finding alternatives when technology issues meant we were not able to use the software we had originally planned to.

**The value of involving participants in dissemination:** While creating the comics was a valuable experience in its own right, the women clearly enjoyed being involved in the dissemination activities and seeing their stories being shared. This helped them to gain further confidence in sharing their experiences.

**The importance of a community-based learner support worker:** The learner support worker played a crucial role in keeping the participants on board over a number of months. For example, she rang the women before each session to remind them to come and encouraged them to join in the dissemination activities. Having someone in the community also meant that the women could drop in between sessions to work on their comic with one-to-one support if they wanted to.